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THESIS

EXCELLENCE IN THE COMBAT ARMS

by

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December 1984

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Excellence in the Combat Arms

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I. THE ROAD TO EXCELLENCE

What makes certain battalions stand above all others? What makes such battalions not only good, but the best in the Army? How do you identify these battalions? What would you see and hear if you belonged to units like this? What makes them different, or better?

A. WHY WE DID THE RESEARCH

These are questions that we have often asked ourselves during our military service. We wanted to find some answers, and we bet the answers to these questions would also be of interest to other officers and NCOs (noncommissioned officers) in combat arms battalions throughout the Army. So we set out to find excellent battalions, tell their stories, and answer these questions.

B. WHO WE ARE

You might ask what makes us uniquely qualified to take on such a project. To tell the truth, perhaps nothing but our similarities to many of you. We're each a combat arms officer (armor, infantry, field artillery) with about ten years average service to our country. Like many of you, we've spent much of that time in companies and battalions, in jobs ranging from platoon leader to company commander to battalion staff. Some of the units we've observed were pretty good; some weren't. We're not the top leaders in the Army, scholars, or theorists; we're just normal soldiers with a real desire to find out what makes the best units click. Unlike you, we had the time to devote to such a study. By telling the story of excellent battalions, we

hope to do our part, in some small way, to make our Army an even better one.

C. WHY THE BATTALION?

Why did we choose to do our work at battalion level? Because we believe the battalion is the last level of command in the Army where the force of the commander's personality can directly influence individual soldiers.[1] The battalion performs the planning, administrative, and logistical functions required at higher echelons; but one man can't do it all. To be honest, it's also the level we're most familiar with. The last reason was a rather selfish one; we each hope to go to battalions again and help make them excellent.

D. WHERE DID WE VISIT?

The decision to go to certain posts, and not others, was due mainly to constraints of time, money, and the desire to get the most "bang for our buck." We chose Fort Hood, Fort Bragg, and Fort Lewis, because they each have a corps and division headquarters. That meant those posts had many senior officers, staff officer evaluators, and, most importantly, combat arms battalions. We chose Fort Ord because it is a division-level post located just down the road from the Naval Postgraduate School where we are presently assigned. As such, it offered a unique opportunity to observe a division on its own.

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[1]The typical Army battalion is commanded by an O5 (lieutenant colonel) and contains 500 to 700 soldiers. For a more detailed description of the battalion, see Appendix 2.

E. A TWO-PHASE STUDY

In deciding how to tackle this project, we were influenced by the Peters and Waterman best seller In Search of Excellence.[2] We divided our study into two phases. Phase I is covered in Chapters 2 and 3. Briefly, the first phase consisted of interviewing approximately forty-five senior leaders who occupy key positions at the corps, division, and brigade level; fifteen of these were general officers.[3] We asked them to think about excellent battalions from their past or present experiences and tell us how they identify them. Then we asked them what a battalion must do to become excellent. Finally, we asked them to nominate some excellent units that we could observe.

In Phase II, we went to those frequently named battalions and spent about two days with each of them. We talked to officers, NCOs, and junior soldiers.[4] We ate in their mess halls, visited their barracks, saw their motor pools, and ran PT (physical training) with them. When we departed each of the seven battalions, we had a pretty good idea about what makes them tick. The results of Phase II are covered in Chapters 4 through 12.

Of the seven high performing battalions we visited, we found five that were certainly among the finest in our Army. The other two showed potential for excellence, but weren't quite there yet. Yes, there was an uncanny similarity between the five excellent battalions. The other two were solid battalions, but markedly different from the other five

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[2]In their book, Peters and Waterman examined the best-run American corporations and described eight attributes of corporate excellence. We highly recommend it as the original research work in the excellence field.

[3]Summaries of all senior leader interviews are on file at the Naval Postgraduate School.

[4]Summaries of all battalion interviews are on file at the Naval Postgraduate School.

in their concepts of teamwork, caring for soldiers, and unit identity.

Did we enjoy ourselves? You bet we did! We freely admit we each got a real charge of adrenaline from being around these excellent units. There's something contagious in the air of these battalions--and we caught it! We hope you catch it, too. We came away from this whole project with a renewed sense of pride in our Army and real optimism for the future.

We want to tell you about the best battalions in our 1984 "Army of Excellence." We don't propose a cookbook approach to excellence; it's tougher than that. Nor do we propose that excellence is the result of some scientific theory. However, we will present examples of how today's finest battalions operate. We hope this study gives you some ideas about how to develop other excellent battalions.

Here's what we found...

II. IDENTIFYING EXCELLENCE

A. OUR ARMY IS ON A ROLL!

Though the intent of our study was not to determine the "State of the Army," we could not help but notice how much better off our Army is compared to a short time ago. The enthusiasm we encountered was contagious. "Airborne! Deep Strike! Power Down! Light Fighter!" We heard lots of comments like, "This is the best shape I've seen our Army in during my twenty-two years of service;" or, "We're producing at max output all the time and loving it--this is the best command environment I've ever been in!" In one division it almost seemed like the air sparked and popped with the purposeful energy of soldiers going about their business. Readiness is better than it's been in a long, long time. Our senior leaders, division and corps commanders together with their staffs, are excited about the quality of the soldiers, the new organizations being created, and the new equipment being fielded. Don't mistake us, though. They are also quick to point out that we have a lot to improve on. But there is definitely a consensus that our "Army is on a roll."

Have you ever wondered how the generals identify excellent battalions? This was one of the questions that we sought answers to in our search for excellence. We think you'll be interested in, and maybe even a little surprised at, our findings. In essence, we asked the top echelons of three corps and five divisions to tell us how they distinguish the excellent battalions from the rest. In all, we talked to about forty-five officers in key command and staff positions. Fifteen were general officers. Almost all the

rest had commanded battalions. There was a surprising amount of agreement among them. Here's what they said.

B. MORE THAN JUST A CURSORY LOOK

Excellence in the combat arms means the ability to fight and win on the battlefield. There's no report or quick look that can tell you whether a battalion has that type of ability. Cursory evaluations can not discriminate between units that just look good and those that are truly excellent. In fact, many of our senior leaders emphasized that there is a big difference between looking good and being good. That's why they like to rely heavily on their own observations and judgements when identifying the excellent battalions.

Early on it became clear to us that these evaluations look beyond the surface level and are not made quickly. Two of the generals, who had only been in their divisions a few months, did not want to identify an excellent battalion. They said that it takes more than a few months to tell. They did not want to rely solely on the reputations of their battalions. One general felt so strongly about the importance of the senior leadership taking the time to inspect properly that he said, "Don't go, generals, unless you can give more than a cursory look to a unit. Otherwise, we foster the appearance level look."

We came away with the impression that their judgments are based largely on their personal assessment of the intangibles[5] and verified by the traditional measures. They do this even though they receive evaluative information from

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[5]We are referring to the classic indicators of unit effectiveness; morale, esprit de corps, proficiency, and discipline. More than ever, we believe in them. Though we could have, we did not group the trends that resulted from this portion of our study under them because we wanted to show you the natural categories that emerged.

several sources. Written and verbal reports come from subordinate commanders and staff. Of course, they hear the rumors too ("Did you hear about how so and so got his butt kicked at NTC?"). But when it comes to assessing excellence, they especially like to rely on their own observations. Then they look for the confirming evidence.

C. THOSE DAMN STATISTICS

"All I've seen is statistics, so I can't recommend an excellent battalion for you to look at yet," was a statement that surprised us from some of the senior officers we interviewed who were new to their divisions. In fact, we even heard about an excellent battalion that had poor statistics: "A battalion in my brigade in Germany had terrible statistics (AWOL, courts-martial, etc.) but focused on its wartime mission and turned from a poorly disciplined unit into an excellent battalion. It must have been very embarrassing for the commander because he always saw his unit at the bottom of the charts on the monthly division readiness meetings. Today that commander is a general."

We were surprised that statistics are as unpopular with most of the generals as they are with most of us. The officers we interviewed explained how individual statistics don't mean much. They can also have unintended effects (remember the body-count stories?). Overemphasis on statistics can drive units to thinking that the numbers are more important than the substance. Some of the generals even told us stories of divisions that they had served in that lost their integrity in an environment heavy with statistics.

Emphasis on scores can result in training for the event instead of for combat. As one brigade commander at Fort Hood told us, "Passing an AGI (Annual General Inspection) or

one hundred per cent qualification on Table VIII doesn't mean you're good. Lots of units train for the event, not for combat. You won't be able to G2 the battlefield like you can a range." One corps commander called the traditional measures flaky and unreliable, especially when used in isolation. How is the qualification conducted? Who's doing the scoring? These are the types of questions he likes to ask.

Yet statistics are used in varying degrees in all the divisions we visited. We learned that good statistics probably don't make you excellent; but bad ones might keep you out of the running. Barracks larcenies, AWOLS, blotters,[6] and USR (Unit Status Report) were the most often mentioned indicators. These measures cannot be used in isolation. Unusual statistics can indicate a unit on the road to excellence like the one mentioned earlier in Germany, which was improving because of actions being taken by its commander. They are corroborating evidence that must be interpreted.

D. A WORD ABOUT INSPECTOR GENERALS

One of the key staff officers we usually interviewed was the IG (inspector general). In fact, we were normally told to see him. At first we were surprised that many times he and his commander did not agree on which battalion was excellent. It later became clear to us that there were a couple of reasons for this difference. First, the IG's time perspective is usually not as current as his commander's. For example, at one of the posts we visited it had been well over a year since the excellent battalion that the general told us about had been inspected. Second, his view is narrower. He focuses on processes such as administration,

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[6]Blotters are the military police incident reports which are distributed daily to the units.

logistics, and morale. He normally doesn't see the battalion in the field.

These processes are important. But the fight and win question is not answered by AGIs. Excellence on these inspections does not equate to an excellent battalion. It probably helps, and poor performance certainly hurts.

We were also struck by the fact that the IGs we talked to emphasized that units should focus on preparing for their wartime mission. As one IG told us, "'PREP FOR AGI' on the training schedule equals a poor unit. Don't prepare for the AGI, prepare for World War III."

E. MISSION ACCOMPLISHMENT

1. Consistent Performance

First and foremost, the excellent battalions accomplish the mission. If you can't do that you're not excellent.

Most of the generals we talked to are looking for consistency in all tasks. But they do not mean peak performance all of the time. One division commander we talked to told us how excellent battalions have a high idling ability. He illustrated the idea with a story: "I was running in Washington, plodding along, working hard on about a seven mile run. Then, this runner glided past me, his head wasn't bobbing. He wasn't breathing hard. I was definitely expending more energy than he. This is what you're looking for, an effortless high performing unit. They do everything that needs to be done and more, yet they still get the troops off by 1630 hrs."

Another division commander explained the same idea a little differently. "I look for a technically and tactically competent battalion. One that doesn't peak. It seeks a watermark that sustains it. It has a profile of performance that is centerline and consistent."

The above stories pretty well reflect what we heard from others. They do not expect a battalion to be operating at peak capacity all the time. Yet excellent battalions perform as if they are. They possess a high idling ability. This is not to say that the excellent battalion is perfect. In fact, it readily admits its mistakes. And when it needs help, it asks for it.

On the other hand, we heard about battalions that got the same results as the excellent battalions, but only because they were driven hard. The officers we talked to did not consider these bad battalions, just not excellent ones. Our impression was that the excellent battalion performs with an eye on the long run, and only rarely moves into high gear. When it does, everyone is pulling together.

2. Execution of the Basics

"A unit rarely falls apart on grand strategy, but rather attention to detail." The corps commander went on to tell us that he looks for the small things like battle-sights, dispersion, and the lay of the guns. Our senior leaders judge units especially by how well they execute the small details of tactics, gunnery, maintenance, and appearance. In other words the basics. One division commander emphasized this when he told us about an artillery battalion he had recently seen in the field: "They looked like a Ft. Sill training film."

They're also quieter. The excellent units have less shouting and yelling. "Hand signals and nods are used to communicate, as opposed to a lot of shouting and yelling about who will carry the ammo box. Or who should do what when the ramp goes down." Things like these are all worked out beforehand, a matter of SOP.

We could really see a division commander's eyes light up when he told us about a machinegunner he had spent

over an hour with in the field recently. "I would go to war with that soldier in a minute! He knew his business. Nobody told him what to do, he just did it. He had taken the initiative in preparing his range card, finding out where the outposts were in front of him, who was on his left and right...," and he had run into quite a few soldiers like this in the battalion he was describing. These are indications that the chain of command is functioning right. Individual leaders can't do everything. The challenge for the chain of command is to get everyone to execute their jobs with initiative.

You can expect the generals to ask questions about the fundamentals like we mentioned above. We don't think you're going to hear "Where are you from?" or, "How's it going?" very often. They pride themselves on being able to look for the right things and ask the relevant questions. If a unit has been in the defense for five hours, they'll look for five hours of work. They'll look at the equipment, and especially the weapons. Are they clean? And they have different questions for each level too. Company commanders can expect different questions than battalion commanders or machinegunners. Finally, even when you don't see them they're checking you out, because "A high performing unit has crisp radio procedures. Push to execute, not to talk."

3. Field Exercises

As you can see from the above, our senior leaders place great weight on their observations of the battalion in the field. One corps commander told us how he watched every major portion of a battalion ARTEP[7] when he was a division

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[7]Are ARTEPs (Army Training and Evaluation Program) diagnostic evaluations or tests? We found that it depends on the division. In some places they are administered at the beginning of the battalion commander's tour in the diagnostic spirit. But always there's some type of field test for the battalion, whether it's the National Training

commander. And his ADC-M (Assistant Division Commander for Maneuver) accompanied each maneuver battalion on the entire ARTEP. Facades don't hold up under these conditions.

The key is to see the unit in the field. How well are the fundamentals executed under stress? The senior leaders are especially concerned with combined arms performance under these conditions. They look for the battalion that can translate a simple mission statement into an imaginative tactical plan. "He doesn't use the standard north to south drop on Sicily Drop Zone when I've had my G3 draw up a scenario that clearly requires the use of three DZs (Drop Zones)." The battalion reaches out and uses all of the assets in the division that can support it.

4. Convoys--"GOTCHA!"

At the end of the exercise, when the last firing position has been policed and the last hole has been covered up, it's all over. All you have to do is roadmarch back to garrison. Wrong! The excellent battalion doesn't get caught with its pants down here either. It knows the favorite trick of the new ADC-S (Assistant Division Commander, for Support) is to check convoys coming home from Yakima at O'dark thirty.

If the load plans aren't squared away in combat, a unit is really going to have problems. Time spent trying to find the aiming circle or looking for the tripod is time wasted, and that's going to get people killed. Safety is important too. The excellent battalion didn't really know the ADC-S would be checking convoys. They were just squared away because that's how they do business. They're a disciplined unit.

Center, Emergency Deployment Readiness Exercises, or ARTEPs.

F. THE SOLDIERS' PRIDE

The senior officers base much of their evaluation on their interactions with the unit's soldiers. They focus on the intangibles. "It's something in the eyes of the soldiers" that gives them the feeling that this is an excellent battalion.

The attitudes they spoke of most often include pride and team spirit. "They get mad about the right things. Those things that impede mission accomplishment. For example, they get upset about not getting instructions early enough so they can max the test. And they get mad when they don't think the umpire's scoring was correct."

They are high on themselves and have confidence in themselves, their buddies, their leaders, and the unit. They say things like, "This is the best battalion in the Army!" and really mean it. And because they believe it, they don't want to let the unit down.

Of course, these soldiers look sharp. They've been inspected. They salute with confidence and sound off, "Black Knight, sir!" The senior officers see a sense of purpose. The soldiers know their mission and orders. And they know where their orders come from.

The soldiers in excellent battalions are not afraid of the generals' visits. This is their chance to show their unit off. And they don't offer excuses for things that are wrong. In fact, they're not afraid to tell the general about their problems. They're relaxed and exhibit a "quiet confidence" as opposed to a lot of yelling and screaming, "Yes Sir! No Sir!" They look you in the eye. And, the battalion commander has the confidence to let the general roam around his unit on his own. He does not run down to the motorpool to insure that the general is escorted through the area.

G. FIRST IMPRESSIONS

We said the generals usually take a few months to identify excellent battalions. However, this does not mean first impressions are not important. As one officer told us, "You only get one chance to make a first impression." The senior officers we interviewed said they couldn't tell if a battalion was excellent in just a few minutes, but they could usually tell whether it was good or not. Appearance is an indicator of discipline. Barracks and supply rooms are neat, clean, and orderly. Bulletin boards are up to date.

One division commander put it this way: "When I go out to training I can usually tell if I'm visiting a good battalion. The tasks, conditions, and standards are spelled out. I see them doing what they're supposed to be doing. The feeding plan calls for at least two hot meals. If weapons and equipment are not being used, they're cleaned and stacked. The reporting NCO understands what the unit is doing and how it fits into the big picture. Finally, when they're finished training they close back in on garrison without waiting."

H. SUMMARY

We didn't uncover many secrets, but we were a little surprised at how subjective the nature of their evaluations are. Consistent performance is key. The leaders we talked to also focused on their observations in the field. That doesn't mean the garrison duties are neglected. As they say in the 82d Airborne, "You have to have both feet planted firmly on each side of Grueber road."[8] Their most important gut impression is formed by their observations of your

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[8]Grueber road is the boundary between the garrison and the tactical training area.

soldiers. While they look for evidence of technical and tactical competence, we were convinced that in the final analysis "It's something in the eyes of the soldiers" that tells them whether the unit can fight and win.

III. THE GENERALS' ADVICE

Now that you know how our senior leaders identify excellent battalions, you may be wondering how they think excellence is achieved. In this chapter, we will describe the keys to excellence, as told to us by some of the best officers in our Army.

A. IT STARTS WITH LEADERSHIP

1. The Battalion Commander

Certainly you're not surprised that we started with leadership. Almost everyone we talked to agreed that the single most important factor in creating the excellent battalion is the leadership of the battalion commander. Eventually the unit will reflect his standards and his personality. In other words, there are no excellent battalions without excellent battalion commanders.

What are some of the characteristics of the excellent battalion commander? Here are some of the things that many of the officers we interviewed stressed.

a. Lead By Example

The battalion commander shares hardships with the troops. We were particularly impressed with the following story from a former brigade commander: "I once saw a battalion commander who pulled his unit through an ARTEP. The weather had become really terrible, but he projected the attitude of 'no big deal.' I knew he was having a tough time because I would see him privately. If he had become sick, the unit wouldn't have made it. Instead, he was very visible during these tough times and the unit responded to his example."

In contrast a corps commander told us about some of the lousy units he had been in. The senior leadership was more concerned with their physical well being than accomplishing the mission.

b. Involved

By being involved the officers we interviewed emphasized the battalion commander's close and continual involvement with his men. This is not to say that he doesn't emphasize the chain of command. But he keeps his fingers on the battalion's pulse and encourages the flow of information to himself. He talks frequently to his soldiers both formally and informally. He spends a lot of time listening or communicating his expectations. He encourages the upward flow of communications.

c. Quiet Excellence

This one surprised us. In several divisions the commanders told us their preferred leadership style was a "quiet excellence" or "quiet confidence." Excellent units do it without a lot of fanfare. Many of the senior leaders we talked to don't like to see a lot of rah, rah or chest beating. One division commander told us, "I don't want my commander to use gimmicks."

d. Delegation

Operate today the way we'll have to operate on the battlefield in the Air Land Battle. Initiative must be developed in junior leaders. One division commander told us how he had to get his officers to step back and oversupervise less. It is especially hard to operate in a decentralized mode because of the fear that something might go wrong. This challenge introduces our next characteristic.

e. Risk Takers

It really struck us when we heard a brigade commander tell us, "We're risk takers in the Falcon Brigade!" He had even placed this statement of philosophy on the slides he uses for briefing new men. He told us he expected people to make mistakes because if you don't, "You're not challenging yourself, you're stagnating." What a difference! When it's put that way, freedom to fail is not the issue. The orientation is on achievement, not failure. We realize not everyone will believe this or even agree with it. But we were impressed!

f. Competence

One general summed up this aspect particularly well. "The single most important factor is the competency of the commander in the branch in which he serves. You can put the best NCOs in a battalion. But if you have incompetent officers, you'll have a poor unit. The outstanding battalion commander forces his officers to learn their business."

One of the inspector generals we talked to had some very well organized thoughts on the subject. "Competency can be broken down into three areas or skills; branch, tactical, and administrative. Branch skills would be infantry specific, for example. The school system does a pretty good job on that. Tactical skills overlap the branches. They are a function of time in the unit and serving in the various leadership positions. Administrative skills are in the areas of supply, maintenance, and personnel. Weaknesses in administrative skills result in putting out fires all the time."

2. Company Officers and NCOs

The battalion commander creates the unit climate. Eventually his company commanders will mirror him. They have to be developed into outstanding company commanders to create the excellent battalion. They require varying degrees of supervision because they are each unique.

Many of the officers we talked to said that in excellent battalions the company commanders earn their way to command. One reason is that this enables the company commander to learn how the battalion operates before assuming command. Another is that it gives the battalion commander a chance to place him in the company which will best fit his personality, strengths, and weaknesses.

A division command sergeant major we talked to said, "There's no such thing as sergeant's business. Don't ever say, 'I don't know about that, that's the command sergeant major's job.'" He pointed out that some people had taken General Starry's film[9] too far. There must be mutual trust and confidence between the officer and his NCOs. Officers must be willing to let NCOs do their jobs. But, this doesn't mean officers don't get involved. They still set standards and inspect. When it's necessary for officers to help, they do so with an eye on developing the NCO.

Younger officers especially have a tough time with this. A division IG put it this way. "The problem is where the roles between the platoon leader and the platoon sergeant have not been agreed on. Then, there's a power struggle that develops. In the best units, the platoon leader and platoon sergeant know their roles and communicate with each other for the betterment of the platoon." Rarely does this degree of role clarity happen by accident. They

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[9]The film Sergeant's Business was produced by General Starry while he was the TRADOC (Training and Doctrine Command) commander. In it he discusses the role of the NCO.

take the time to work it out and, if necessary, are assisted in doing this by the commander.

Here's one description of an excellent platoon sergeant that really impressed us: "When a new lieutenant takes over the platoon, the platoon sergeant continues to run it. After about two or three months there will be a power struggle between them over who's really in charge. The platoon leader will win that struggle if he has an outstanding platoon sergeant."

Of course, most of the leadership characteristics that describe battalion commanders also apply at the company level. However, as you move down the chain of command, the ability to step back becomes less important. Specific detailed instructions become more important. By stepping back at the higher levels, we mean that squad and platoon leaders are trained to develop their abilities to give instructions and train soldiers to tasks, conditions, and standards. As one corps commander said, "If we had an excellent Army, we wouldn't see 'round-robin' training for the EIB (Expert Infantryman's Badge) Test. Squad leaders would train their squads."

B. AN OVERRIDING SENSE OF MISSION

Excellent battalions develop an overriding sense of mission. The soldiers want to be the best at whatever they do, whether its "max-ing the AGI," or being the best on the ARTEP. Making the mission real is the key. Many of the generals we talked to felt that battalions overseas, close to the enemy, have some advantages in this area. The same can be said for CONUS (Continental United States) units with strategic deployment requirements.

The division commanders we talked to emphasized that the excellent battalion commander "understands my goals and

objectives." Then, he clearly enunciates the mission in a way that everyone understands. He uses BTMS (Battalion Training Management System) to translate the mission into operational terms. As one corps commander told us, "An excellent unit uses BTMS and makes it work. Prioritizing training tasks is vital to sustaining good units. The Rangers, for example, have identified a few tasks and they drill and drill on those."

It follows then, that battalions become excellent by paying special attention to training. They do things to maximize their use of available training time. They concentrate their professional development programs for officers and NCOs on train-the-trainer subjects. Squad leaders conduct hip pocket training. Post details and guard are turned into training opportunities by keeping unit integrity.

Leaders in the excellent battalion convey a philosophy of being good instead of merely looking good. "If it doesn't contribute to killing Ivan, we just might not do it."

C. THE SYSTEM

1. Incentives

Excellent battalions help people to excel. As one officer told us, "All soldiers, except the ten percent, want to do well and will do what's expected of them." Therefore, the excellent battalions pay close attention to incentives and expectations.

They are generous with rewards (and sometimes time off). There's lots of positive feedback. They make a big deal of things like letters of appreciation and achievement. Good deeds get recognized. And they take the trouble to process awards. One general told us, "You can get a lot of

mileage out of an eighty cent medal." And there's the other side too. As one officer told us, "It's unfortunate, but true, that in many cases rewards are a lack of sanctions. Therefore, you must pay an equal amount of attention to what the big sanctions are. What do I have to do to stay out of trouble around here?"

2. Expectations

Soldiers must know what is expected of them. A superhuman effort is made to do this. A lot of time must be spent explaining policies and priorities, especially in dealing with personnel turbulence. It starts informally with the sponsor that was selected and continues through all the "new guy briefings." They are constantly reinforced, not only by what leaders say, but the performance they demand or allow. These expectations become the battalion's standards.

Since risk taking is encouraged, people feel free to make mistakes and learn. Mistakes are not ignored, they are corrected. An ignored mistake becomes a standard by default. One division commander summed it up this way, "My best experiences have been in units where there was freedom to fail and make mistakes. I expect to be called for my sins, but without being crushed. My worst experiences were in a bureaucratic, dictatorial, one man show."

3. Power Down

Power Down is a catchy phrase we heard at Fort Hood. As one general told us, "All Power Down says is I as a battalion commander delegate the full responsibility to you in your grade. The idea is for the chain of command to do its job. It's still classical leadership. Inherent in Power Down is delegating authority equal to responsibility, setting high standards, and assessing performance." The

following story we heard illustrates how we got away from this.

The Armorer

Some inspectors from division or corps started conducting white-glove (not serviceability) inspections of the arms room. When an arms room failed, they would return to their office and write a letter describing how screwed up the arms room was. It would be signed "For the Commander" and addressed so as to require indorsements from every level above the company it went to. Well, we officers are loyal achievers and doers. We have the attitude, "If the division commander says my weapons are dirty, then I'll fix it myself if necessary." You know the rest of the story. The company commander told the armorer to inspect weapons before accepting them. The chain of command was off the hook because the company commander took their power away. The armorer had their power. They had powered up.

Power Down means making the chain of command responsible for determining whether weapons are ready to be turned in. It also means spending less organizational energy on white glove inspections and all those RBIs (Return by Indorsement letters).

Another officer described it this way. "Every organization has a fair amount of expertise. The problem is to get the guys that have it to perform. Don't come on too strong. Give those guys, Master Gunners or twenty year maintenance techs, a chance to come through with their expertise."

4. The Daily Game Plan

It takes organization to achieve the "high idling" ability we talked about earlier. We heard about how having goals for the day can help. For example, the motor sergeant can develop certain objectives for his mechanics for the day. He can "contract" with his men that when they finish these objectives to standards, they're done for the day. The mechanics will probably get everything done in about half the time they used to. But don't let the motor

sergeant go back on the contract. Assigning more duties, such as "OK, now go clean your weapons," will destroy the motivation to finish early. Leaders have to learn to more accurately judge what can be accomplished with good organization.

Leaders who are used to the "Hey, You!" approach need help in learning how to plan. One of the techniques we heard about from one officer was called the Daily Game Plan. At the end of each day, platoon leaders and platoon sergeants in his battalion were supposed to have a plan in detail for the next day's activities. They were supposed to brief the next day's plan to the platoon by 1700 hours. The battalion commander would spot check platoon leaders or platoon sergeants by having them report to his office and briefing him on their Daily Game Plan.

Another officer told us how he got planning started in the motorpool. "The way I brought it off was by first convincing the old timers that it was necessary. That their bays were not corner gas stations, but Cadillac garages. A scheduling board was used in each bay."

Ideas like these insure that good planning is conducted at the lowest levels. It also has settling effects on the soldiers' families, since they can tell their wives whether they're going to be home late or not.

Standardization can help too. Remember? We had a big push on this a few years ago. The commander of the first U.S. tank battalion to win the Canadian Cup Trophy[10] emphasized standardization: "All our shops in the motorpool were layed out exactly alike. Every tank was loaded exactly alike, down to the wrench. This made it a lot easier for someone transferred within the battalion to adjust to his

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[10]The best tank crews from each NATO country meet annually at Grafenwohr, W. Germany, for a shoot off to win this prestigious award.

new company. We made a game of it. I would have B Company load out C Company." Standardization also facilitates inspection, which helps maintain high standards. And in combat, it helps to know exactly where all your equipment is as well as your buddy's.

D. DISCIPLINE

We were told in various ways that discipline is the life and soul of the Army. "It's routinely, habitually, and automatically doing tasks to high standards." Or, "It's doing what you're supposed to because it's right." Still another definition we heard was "Proper action in the absence of orders." They all mean the same thing.

Much of what the generals had to say about discipline ties into the subjects we have already covered. It starts with the clear communication of expectations and standards. As one officer said, our society is an undisciplined (not lawless) one. Therefore, instilling discipline is one of the greatest challenges faced by leaders. For example, "Using a ground guide when you're backing a truck because you know it's the right and safe thing to do. Not out of fear, but because you'd be ashamed to do it wrong."

There are two aspects of discipline, the first is law and order. Here you use Article 15s, and various rewards, punishments, and administrative actions. This includes "Being ruthless in getting rid of the bad apples. Especially those who are just in it for the money. There are certain people who shouldn't be in our Army; help them out."

The second aspect of discipline is value based. This is the self sustaining discipline for which we strive. It is developed by the things we've been discussing; leading by example, instilling a sense of mission, communicating

expectations, rewarding appropriate behavior, and giving the soldier the self respect that comes with responsibility by Powering Down. Another prerequisite for ingraining this value based discipline is the topic of our next section, taking care of your soldiers.

E. CARING

Units become excellent by showing their soldiers they care, from the beginning. "They have great integration programs. People are sponsored (it's ironic that sponsorship as a tradition is strongest among the group that needs it the least, the officer corps). They have a sheet on their bed their first night. Lots of attention is given to orientation and integration. The company commander greets all new men within twenty-four hours of their assignment. When he greets them, he not only briefs them but also interviews them concerning their background and goals. He tries to match the soldier's strengths as best he can to the opportunities in the company.

Units become excellent because the soldiers feel they are genuinely cared for. Leaders pay attention to the soldiers' personal needs like chow, pay, and quarters. Since there are a lot more married soldiers today these battalions also have programs to take care of the families.

The caring environment contrasts with the environment of leadership by fear. This is not to say that caring leaders are nice guys. They demand high standards and design stressful training. They are never satisfied with anything less than the best their soldiers can offer. They help people learn to become winners.

These leaders really help soldiers become all they can be. They concern themselves with the soldier's professional development. They show the soldier how his personal needs

can satisfy those of the Army. They also make time for regular counselling and tell the troops their strengths, as well as their weaknesses. In a caring environment the good soldier looks forward to counselling because he gets "another good one." This contrasts with the units where counselling has a negative connotation.

Leaders in excellent units find out what their soldiers' problems are. The chain of command does not hesitate to elevate soldier problems that can't be solved. And these leaders know that a problem that is perceived by the soldier is real.

Caring builds commitment. This commitment is both to the mission and the members of the team. It comes from the environment that the leaders create.

F. STRATEGY

Several of the officers we interviewed talked about an overall strategy for achieving excellence. Here's a composite strategy developed from their remarks.

1. Make an Assessment

"You have to start with a personnel assessment, then the status of equipment. Next, you chart your course. And you maintain that course; you don't let little things knee-jerk you around. That's the worst thing that can happen to a unit."

2. Build on Small Successes

One general put it this way: "Everybody wants to be a winner. You find something that breeds success. It might start with having the best mess hall. That way the soldiers feel like you're taking care of them too. Next, maybe they are trained to shoot their weapons better. It takes time.

Then set a higher standard, such as you must qualify your own tank. After a while, things start to snowball."

A former brigade commander talked about bragging rights: "They select certain things to win at and then go for them all out. Now they've got bragging rights. For example, the division had a field day competition. One battalion decided it would be best in the military skills events. This became their bragging rights."

3. Create Uniqueness

One command sergeant major told us, "People like to be here, because here they are different. They all want to be here whether it's career enhancing, adventurous, or whatever. And new people aren't accepted right away. They have to prove themselves to the unit first."

One division commander told us about how excellent battalions must first suffer through adversity. As an example he told us about a battalion that conducted a 100 kilometer footmarch over a period of nights with an attack on an airfield at the end. Events like this help create the unit's character.

We even heard about unit mascots. "In one brigade they've got these silly-assed chickens. But it fires up the troops and gives them something to rally around."

4. Control Competition

Competition is inherent in everything we do. Every company commander naturally competes with his peers. Most of the officers we interviewed felt this way about competition within the battalion: "I believe that competition within the battalion hurts. If you have best maintenance, best NBC (Nuclear Biological Chemical), etc. and A Company wins them all, it may be great for A Company. But it destroys the rest of the units. There is a very delicate

balance. Overall, I think competition can be divisive to a unit's identity. Best maintenance competition can result in accusations of 'they stole...' and whether they did or not, the ideas start to pop up that in order to win you have to shave."

G. NOT A FORMULA

The preceding keys and strategy represent a synthesis of the ideas we heard from the senior officers we interviewed. Leadership is most important. In creating excellence, the leaders develop an overriding sense of mission. They pay close attention to the command climate and emphasize discipline and taking care of people. Finally they develop a strategy for attaining excellence.

We do not claim that these ideas are a guaranteed formula for success. We hope they will help you develop your own ideas for improving your unit. As one general told us, "You can't make this study of yours too scientific. Put it out and if the shoe fits, wear it. It is an art, not a science."

IV. THE PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

Have you ever served in an excellent battalion? Or do you wonder what it's like to be in a really good unit--the one with the best reputation in the division? In Phase II of our study, we wanted to discover what it's like to serve in one of those battalions.

A. DISCOVERING EXCELLENCE

Armed with the ideas that the generals and other senior leaders had told us, we headed off to find the excellent battalions. And find excellence we did...some of the first battalions into Grenada...an artillery battalion with the three highest battery scores on their readiness test in the division...battalions with winners of the Draper and Gilmore awards[11] ...battalions which had come through ARTEPs and AGIs with nearly perfect records. But those distinctions only scratched the surface of why those units were top performers.

In our search for excellence, we wanted to observe as many battalions as we possibly could. In selecting battalions to interview, we used the following criteria: the consensus of the officers interviewed during Phase I; the strength of their views; and the availability of the battalions. Fortunately we caught most of the battalions at a good time: either coming back from an ARTEP, a major field exercise, or from REFORGER.[12] We ended up spending 2-3 days

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[11]These awards are given annually to the company and battery that are evaluated as the best in the division.

[12]REFORGER (Redeployment of Forces to Germany) is an annual exercise in which battalions are deployed from CONUS to West Germany to participate in NATO exercises.

in each of seven combat arms battalions. What an exhilarating experience it was! We told people we weren't inspectors, but rather we were there to tell the battalion's story of excellence to the rest of the Army. What a difference that made in their attitude towards us!

We conducted individual interviews with the battalion commander, the staff, the company commanders, and their first sergeants. We conducted group interviews with lieutenants, senior NCOs, middle grade NCOs, and enlisted soldiers E1-E4. The group size approximated 8-10 in each case and interviews usually lasted about an hour. During the interviews we attempted to identify what each battalion did that made it perform well, why the battalion performed better than others, and how the battalion went about its business. In asking our questions, we avoided ones that could be answered with simple yes/no responses. Instead we asked open ended questions that usually began with the words "describe" or "what." We then typically used "why" questions as follow-ups after receiving answers to our initial questions. For example, we might start with the question, "Your battalion has the reputation of being excellent, to what do you attribute this reputation? Why is this battalion an excellent one?" We let the people describe their battalion for us.

In addition to interviewing a cross-section of the battalion, we observed some of their daily operations to see how they went about their business. We ran PT with them, ate in their mess halls, sat in on some of their meetings, and attended their payday formations. We ended up interviewing over 200 soldiers in the seven units we visited. The result of all our time spent with the battalions? As you will see, there is a lot of consistency between what the senior leaders of our Army thought and what we saw in the excellent units.

B. GOOD UNITS GETTING BETTER

The units we observed were continually striving to stay excellent. They had been good for some time and enjoyed an excellent reputation. Even so, the battalions we studied appeared on their way to bigger and better things.

We observed several things that occurred because of this excellent reputation. First, the top battalions draw the top people. Many of these units have to turn away those who want desperately to get into the battalion. Some soldiers who were in the excellent units lobbied long and hard to get there. The appeal of being on a winning team was very strong. Secondly, once the reputation has been achieved, higher headquarters leaves the excellent units alone. The units achieved the best of both worlds. They not only drew the top people, but had the authority to run their own affairs.

This is not to say that we did not hear negative comments about the battalion. We did. But the attitude was "Our chain of command is doing all it can to get it squared away! We are going to get better in this battalion."

C. THE PILLARS.

After many attempts, we ended up with the following attributes as the best descriptors of the excellent units we visited, each of which is amplified in the chapters that follow.

- Leadership by example. The entire chain of command sets the example with actions, not talk about actions.
- Focus on combat: a shared value. The excellent units prepare for combat. Everything else is secondary.

- Power Down. The excellent battalions foster an excellent command climate, marked by decentralized operations and subordinates who are trusted and allowed to grow professionally.

- Strong unit identity. Attitude and approach to training create a special pride in the unit.

- Caring with a capital C. All units talk about taking care of the soldier. In the excellent units, they do it.

- High standards and discipline. Doing things right becomes engrained in the unit as a central organizational value.

- Teamwork, a way of life. The attitude is "We're in this thing together."

- Consistent excellent performance. The excellent units perform well without peaking, from ARTEPs to AGIs to maintenance inspections.

The story we want to tell is about battalions that think of themselves as families and take great pride in themselves and in their units; battalions that are well led, possessing many of the qualities extolled in present day leadership and management literature; battalions that know the commander is the key to their success because he understands people and "acts like a human being." These battalions view their success at getting the job done as almost an afterthought because "We just try to excel at everything we do, and the tasks take care of themselves."

This, then, is not our theory on how battalions become excellent. Instead, it is our description of what we saw in seven combat arms battalions that were identified to us as being excellent. Let us now go and take a look at excellence in combat arms battalions.

V. FOLLOW ME!

Without a doubt, the key to being an excellent battalion lies squarely on the battalion commander's shoulders. It is hard to overemphasize this point. That lieutenant colonel sets the tone of the unit, and everything else follows from the climate he establishes. We observed several common characteristics that stood out to us.

A. THE BATTALION COMMANDER, THE KEY

First and foremost, the commanders lead by example. One battalion commander from Ft. Ord, during his unit's 100 kilometer road march, walks every step of the way with 50 pounds like the rest of his soldiers. Another commander at Ft. Hood challenges his company commanders to beat him on the tank section battle run "if they can." All of the battalion commanders participate in PT. They are not conducting meetings during that time. Many of the commanders lead the battalion weekly or monthly run. They are out front, leading the way. A common description that we frequently heard was, "He (the battalion commander) never asks you to do something he hasn't done himself."

The commanders of these units realize that their actions express their priorities, and not their words. In the excellent battalions, the commanders show the way by leading and setting the example.

None of the commanders we observed excite easily. As one battalion commander told us, "Not everything is a crisis. My predecessor went through about eight phones in a year. I don't get excited as easily." This is not to say they never get excited or angry. They do. They become

angry when something <u>really</u> important occurs. These battalion commanders recognize that organizational energy is limited, and everything can't always be the best. As one XO put it, "We don't go into overdrive all the time around here."

All the commanders share the hardships that their soldiers face, and this makes a tremendous difference in the eyes of the soldiers. They know their commander is out there at midnight with them in the pouring rain. Another example came from a battalion commander himself. "My brigade commander wanted the officers to go home early from our FTX (field training exercise) and let the second string take them home. I thought about that for a minute and knew that would be sending the wrong signal to the soldiers. We needed to be there, especially at that time."

Additionally, we observed visible battalion commanders. They don't spend a lot of time in the office. Instead they frequently walk around, observing and talking to people. They have to be tactically and technically proficient to be comfortable doing this. They know their business, and don't have to "hide in the office" like some of their predecessors. Commanders value the informal communication that their visibility brings.

The excellent battalion commanders <u>listen</u> to people. They are open, accessible, and they value people's opinions. Most of the commanders (battalion and company) have no set open door policy; instead they are available any time. As one commander put it, "I've always got time for soldiers." We also found the battalion commanders involve their officers and NCOs in the decision making process. As one told us, "I'm not the smartest guy in the world. I've got all those ideas out there waiting to be tapped." They are not hung up on their own status. These commanders don't always agree with their subordinates, but they do take the time to listen. People are important to them.

As a result, the battalion commanders gain commitment to their vision. The excellent battalion commanders realize that if people think they have even modest control over their destinies, they will persist at tasks and have greater commitment.

We observed involved commanders, not "micromanagers." As one told us, "I don't want to command any more companies. I've commanded three, and that's enough." They do not have their fingers in everybody's pie, but instead let the XO and the S3 handle the details. The excellent battalion commanders step back and command the battalion with a strategic sense of where they want it to go.

We often heard that soldiers can tell the excellent battalion commanders "bad news." The commanders realize that bad news doesn't get better with age. More importantly, the messenger doesn't get "shot," even if he is the guilty party. In the excellent units, the battalion commander knows what's going on. Contrast this with battalions where people either hide things or compromise their integrity, so they won't be the bearers of bad news.

We saw battalion commanders who command for all the right reasons. One told us: "My goal was never to make general officer, but to command a battalion. I want to be remembered as a teacher. The thing that would please me most is for one of my lieutenants to be able to think like me five to ten years from now." And we believe this came from his heart; so do his soldiers. The commanders genuinely care for the welfare of the unit. As one S3 told us, "As old fashioned as it might be, the defense of the nation is an important value to our battalion commander." Values and unit welfare: the right reasons for commanding.

The commanders take things with a grain of salt. They often display a keen sense of humor and the ability to rib. In one unit the battalion commander gives a "smooth wood

award" to the officer who makes the biggest personal mistake of unbelievable proportion. It doesn't stop with the officers. In battalion formation the commander uses a stretcher and plunger to bring home his point about getting the "dumbass disease" during an upcoming long weekend. Good natured kidding establishes a sense of camaraderie within the unit. More importantly, it drives the point home.

We found the battalion commanders are good judges of character. People prove themselves before they command. The battalion commanders then allow them the autonomy to command because they are proven performers.

The commanders compete with a vengeance. As one battalion commander told us, "I'll damn sure try to be number one, but I won't compromise my integrity to do it." We observed an intense desire to do well, but not at the expense of core values in the battalion.

The commanders view teaching as one of their most important responsibilities. One said: "I feel like one of my jobs is to prepare not only my XO and S3 to be battalion commanders, but my company commanders as well." These commanders understand that excellent leadership is teaching.

Finally, we observed what our senior leaders called "quiet excellence." These commanders are for the most part soft spoken. They don't have the rah, rah that one might expect. Instead, we saw cool, calm, and collected commanders. Their battalions do things without a lot of fanfare.

What is the result of these characteristics of the commander? Commanders are held in almost complete awe throughout the battalion. Stories run rampant about the old man, and he commands the respect and loyalty of all those under him. As one soldier said, "We don't want to let him down!"

B. A WORD ABOUT THE PREVIOUS ONE

We heard of some cases where the previous battalion commanders took a unit that was "on its ass" and turned it into a good unit. We noticed that the "kick ass" guy achieved results, but often at the expense of unit morale. We wondered if once a unit gets to the level of "good," is no longer floundering, and the people are more task mature, can this unit become excellent without changing leadership style?[13] We saw "quiet" leaders who developed their battalions from good ones to excellent ones. Without exception, the units we visited told us that the battalion had been good for some time. They became excellent when the new battalion commander established a new command climate.

C. THE ENTIRE CHAIN OF COMMAND

Although most of this chapter has focused on the battalion commander, he certainly can't do it all himself. We observed that the spirit of the commander infects the entire chain of command. Officers stay until their troops go home, even to change an engine. The entire chain of command runs PT, from the CSM to the lowest private. NCOs and officers alike share the hardships with their soldiers. The point is the leaders in the unit set the tone by leading by example. A tried and true principle of leadership to be sure, but a principle that is working in the excellent battalions.

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[13] In Hersey and Blanchards' Situational Leadership Model, the authors suggest varying leadership style based on the maturity of the leaders relative to a particular task. For example, with followers who are highly mature in the task of tank gunnery, the authors would suggest a delegating style by the leader. Followers who are task immature for tank gunnery would require a more authoritative or telling style.

VI. FOCUS ON COMBAT: A SHARED VALUE

The excellent battalions focused on the "right things." In this chapter we'll concentrate on why, and how, they did this.

A. IT COMES FROM THE TOP

We found that in the excellent units the vision comes from the battalion commander. He sets the tone for his unit. The process of passing the vision and his values down starts with his inbriefings to new soldiers. The battalion commander sees all of the new soldiers that come in, and he sees many of them individually. In one unit, the battalion commander makes it a point to inbrief, one-on-one, all E7s and above that come into the battalion. He explains his command philosophy, his value system, and his vision for the battalion during this initial talk. This emphasis goes a long way toward getting the new members of the battalion on board with the direction he is taking the unit, and they quickly are indoctrinated on the values the leader of the battalion thinks are most important.

B. EMPHASIZE THE RIGHT THINGS

The excellent units make a conscious effort to focus on the important things. There are priorities set in the battalion--and the first priority is combat. If it doesn't contribute to readiness for combat, the unit looks long and hard at fighting or ignoring the requirement. We found active S3s, ones who did not simply pass on requirements from brigade. A lot of petty requirements get eliminated before they make it to company level. As one officer told

us, "We don't paint white rocks in this outfit. If it doesn't pertain to readiness, we fight not to do it."

We found that the units can sell their battalions to higher headquarters, but don't go out of their way to do so. After all, one of the reasons that we were sent to a particular battalion was its ability to sell itself. These units let their records stand on merit. There isn't a lot of preparation for the general's visits. As one CSM told us, "He sees us as we are. We feel we're doing things right all the time, so there is no need to spend a lot of time getting ready for him."

We also thought the units we were referred to might just focus on the eyewash that makes them look good to outsiders. Do they look good at the expense of being good? We don't think so. Above all, the emphasis that we saw was on performance--on being good. But there is no denying that looking good is part of being excellent also. It is part of the high standard that is set in the excellent units, and was probably one reason we were referred to the particular units we saw. But that's not the focus. The focus in the battalion is on excelling at the right things, and looking good is fallout from doing things right.

C. VALUES SHARED BY ALL

The battalions learn many of their values from the stories and myths surrounding the battalion commander. For example, the battalion that had just returned from REFORGER had this to say about their battalion commander: "He had only one mission statement for us during REFORGER, and that was to 'KICK THE BRITISH' ASS!' That was all he said."

We heard many similar stories that typify the battalions' belief in being the best. We have already discussed some of the other values that the excellent units hold dear.

They attend to the details of executing a mission. They believe in the importance of people. They believe in the importance of informality to enhance communication. Integrity above reproach is a value held by all. They believe in training continually to a high standard and not taking shortcuts. They take care of the soldiers physically, morally, and spiritually. And, as we will see, they certainly value taking risks, developing new ideas, accepting an occasional failure, and learning from mistakes.

How do these values get manifested in the battalion? It doesn't stop with a new soldier's inbriefing. It's simultaneous attention to new ideas and to the "nuts and bolts" details of the mission. It comes about by leaders being comfortable with the technical and tactical knowledge of their profession, and being highly visible to the soldiers. And it comes from leaders being approachable and going the extra mile for their soldiers. We found that it comes from the chain of command's ability to unleash excitement in the battalion. People are having fun and are excited about soldiering!

We witnessed the shared values that are present in the battalion. Those who can't, or won't, adopt this value system usually don't last long in the unit. For these battalions, there truly is a belief in being the best. And it starts with a vision from the battalion commander.

D. FOCUS ON COMBAT

1. A Sense of Purpose

All the senior leaders talked about the role that mission played in determining a unit's readiness. Some of the units we visited, in particular the ones in the 82nd Airborne Division, have the emphasis of mission simplified for them. The soldiers in that division know that in

eighteen hours they could be deployed, on the ground, and fighting. Grenada drove this home for the soldiers of the 82nd. As one XO told us, "In the 82nd, everybody knows we're not getting any readier; this time tomorrow we could be fighting anywhere in the world." What's the impact of all this? The division stays ready because the sense of mission in the 82nd is so high. In one sense the leaders of the 82nd Airborne Division have their job simplified for them, because there is no need to convey a sense of urgency to the soldiers. It is there, lived everyday.

So how does the battalion at Ft. Ord or at Ft. Hood convey the same type of urgency to their soldiers? Can a battalion that is not in Korea, Germany, or the 82nd have the same sense of mission that these units obviously do? We posed that same question to the leaders of the excellent battalions. They answered that they have to work harder to establish a sense of mission in the unit. We observed some interesting methods of driving home the point in the excellent battalions. In one field artillery battalion at Ft. Ord, the battalion commander has instituted a case study program for his officer development program. Every month he assigns a probable area for deployment to one of the batteries or the fire support teams, and they report to the rest of the officers the likely military, political, and geographical situations. The program has become so popular that the NCOs have started the same sort of program, and it is likely the soldiers will soon be learning about these "hot spots" also. This battalion has actively sought a way to promote its new sense of mission under the Infantry Division Light concept.

Another battalion at Ft. Hood uses intelligence training as the primary vehicle to promote the sense of mission. When the S2 briefs the enemy situation during an ARTEP or other training exercise, he talks about the Soviets

or the East Germans and not OPFOR (opposing forces). This same battalion uses their European contingency mission to convey the same point. As the S2 told us, "We put everything we do in terms of a real mission. It instills in the soldiers a feeling that we are ready to fight a real enemy, not an OPFOR. We make them understand the Soviets' doctrine and their order of battle. And we use quite a few European news items to hammer the same message home."

Other battalions say you can convey a sense of purpose by training for major events. One battalion is already gearing up for its National Training Center (NTC) visit six months from now by talking about Soviet tactics and previous units' visits to NTC. As one S3 put it, "NTC was the best thing that the Army ever did. It gives us a chance to put all our systems into operation. It gives the soldiers something to shoot for."

We found that the excellent units which are not in the 82nd Airborne Division use these sorts of ideas to engrain in their soldiers the sense of purpose that our senior leaders feel is needed in an excellent battalion. The soldiers in those units honestly feel they have a worthwhile function to perform. Even though they might not be defending the Fulda Gap, they feel like their contributions are a necessary part of their battalion's success.

2. Live Firing

We must underscore the importance of live firing in a battalion's ability to prepare for combat. All of the excellent battalions create opportunities for themselves to live fire as much as they possibly can. They use all of the assets that are available: A-10's, cobras, indirect fire support, anything that can possibly be used. One battalion commander at Ft. Bragg said, "We do more live firing than anyone. We do as many company and platoon live fires as we

possibly can schedule." Often the battalions have to go through massive red tape to obtain all these assets, but they feel the effort is justified when they realize the payoffs. As the S3 put it, "We conduct the most sophisticated live fire training in the division. Our battalion was the first to have Air Force close air support in a live fire in ten or fifteen years. We had to go all the way to a very high Air Force Headquarters to do it, but it was worth it."

Excellent battalions conduct realistic training. These battalions realize there is no substitute for doing live fires. In their minds, simulations just don't cut it when it comes to preparing a unit for the sights and sounds of battle. The attitude is "The more live firing, the better!"

3. Preparing For Combat, Not the AGI

No unit better exemplifies this attitude than one battalion at Ft. Hood. It was originally scheduled for its Annual General Inspection during April, but the battalion commander decided to move it up to the first week in December. He did this so the battalion could better train for the National Training Center mission in July. This feat is all the more amazing when one learns that this battalion commander is scheduled to change command in March. The battalion commander's actions truly express his priorities. He could have taken the easy way out and not had another AGI, but instead he selflessly opted to focus the battalion on its wartime mission. And the company commanders' reaction? They have taken it in stride. They realize that in this battalion preparing for their wartime mission is what is important.

The vision and values of the battalion come from the top. As we have seen, a sense of mission is one way the excellent battalions emphasize preparation for combat. The

innovative approaches displayed by the chain of command drive home a sense of mission and purpose to the soldiers. By using live fires, the Officer and NCO Development programs, and the National Training Center as tools, the battalions keep humming along toward their overall mission of staying ready for combat.

VII. POWER DOWN

The term Power Down was a widely used one at Ft. Hood. We thought it aptly described all the battalions we encountered.[14] It didn't mean totally decentralized operations, a much maligned term in our Army which brings visions of units running amuck. Instead Power Down meant an excellent command climate all the way up and down the chain; and it meant that subordinates were trusted and allowed to grow professionally.

A. COMMAND CLIMATE

We observed particularly outstanding command climates in the units we visited. It occurs because the battalion commanders make it happen. And often it doesn't come easily. For example, we observed one brigade, which was unfortunately commanded by a "dictator." He has the company commanders on a string and attempts to jerk them around daily. Nevertheless, the battalion commander shields his company commanders sufficiently where they feel they still command companies. In the excellent battalions the company commanders have the autonomy to run their companies. Sometimes this means extraordinary efforts on the part of the battalion commanders.

It extends down the line to the tank commanders and section sergeants, too. The sergeants conduct training for their sections and crews. Centralized classes in the companies are not allowed.

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[14] See Chapter 3 for a general's description of what Power Down means.

Power Down doesn't mean the battalion commanders turn everyone loose without any guidance or lose control of their companies. Those down the line still hold core values of the battalion central: high standards and doing things right. Even without the battalion commander present or looking over the company commander's shoulder, the battalion standard is a way of life. If this standard is not engrained, the battalion commander holds a closer rein on the companies. That is, the battalions don't decentralize if the companies aren't mature enough. The excellent battalion commanders understand that different subordinates need a different degree of Power Down.

Power Down also includes the battalion commander's philosophy towards the mission. As talked about in Chapter 5, the excellent battalion commanders don't get involved in the details of the battalion, but instead command their battalions. The battalion commanders issue mission statements and wait for results. As one battalion commander put it, "I will say we need FASCAM (Field Artillery Scatterable Mines) here, then I will wait for results. I won't tell the S3 how to access the FASCAM." The S3 in the same battalion gave another example: "The boss tells us, 'Here's the final product I'd like to see. It's round , it's brown, and it bounces. Now go out and give me that.'" In other words, the excellent battalion commanders tell their subordinates what they want. They don't tell them <u>how</u> to accomplish it.

We found that people are trusted in the excellent units. The chain of command shows confidence in their soldiers. The best example was one related to us by an S1: "At the brigade officers' call, the colonel lets us speak our piece. He doesn't try to shut us up or finish our sentences for us, as we've seen in other units. And there's no recrimination if we say something he doesn't agree with." In addition to trust, people are treated like adults. It is understood

that section chiefs do know their profession, are capable of good ideas, and can make decisions. People's talents are used, not ignored, in the excellent units.

B. DEVELOPMENT OF SUBORDINATES

The excellent battalions use their noncommissioned officers. The officers aren't trying to do everything themselves. Instead we saw NCOs setting up brigade runs, running rifle ranges, or running section PT. They are given tasks to do, and are told what is expected of them. And then they go out and do it.

We also found that the excellent units allow mistakes. The battalion commander is not keeping a notebook on every officer writing down mistakes. Instead, as one officer told us, "The fact that we do more than what's required, and the fact that we can try new things without having our heads chopped off, makes us good." One battalion commander related another story: "The hardest thing I had to overcome when I assumed command was getting my officers to talk to me. With my predecessor, they were afraid to say something wrong because of the repercussions. I want them to talk to me so that I can hear their ideas. I'm not out to roll heads because they don't know something."

Participation in the battalion's processes is also a common theme in the battalions. We saw first sergeants writing training schedules with all the enlisted having some input, even if it is just athletics and recreation time. The people in the battalion feel like they have a stake in how the battalion goes about its business. The result? As one group of lieutenants told us, "It's easier to support something once we've had our say in it." People at the lowest levels in the battalion have a say in how the battalion does things, or at least they <u>perceive</u> they do.

One battalion commander told us, "If a guy feels like he has a voice and can sway the old man, it makes a difference."

Nowhere, however, will the development of subordinates be more dramatic than on the modern battlefield. In the next war, company commanders are the ones who will need to make those decisions necessary to win battles. As one battalion commander stated, "In 2-3 weeks after the war starts, I won't be around. I'll either be a dead war hero, or I'll be forming a new battalion from what remains and taking a lot of my leaders with me. That makes it my responsibility to develop those that work under me." Another one put it, "I want to develop leaders who are smart, competent, and capable of performing missions without me standing in their hip pockets. Every successful organization in combat has had Power Down." The Army needs good independent thinkers, and that's what we found in the excellent battalions.

Power Down, then, was not just a gimmicky term used at Ft. Hood. Although called different things in different places, the concept is a viable one, lived everyday by the excellent units. The result of all this Power Down is that we saw units emphasizing long term results and not just short term ones. Battalion commanders are concerned about the welfare of the unit and their subordinates in the long term, and are not simply concerned with next week's training brief to the Commanding General. The excellent units don't cut people off at the knees for making a mistake. Instead they encourage risks and develop their leaders by empowering them with the authority to do their jobs. No concept is lived with more conviction in the excellent units than Power Down.

VIII. STRONG UNIT IDENTITY

One of the most striking things that hit us as we traveled to the excellent units was the amount of pride that the battalions had. We saw and felt it at all levels in the unit. Everyone displayed a positive attitude, even in the face of arduous circumstances. We observed a field artillery battalion that had converted from 155mm to 105mm to 105mm improved. Three weapons systems in the last eighteen months! Two battalions had been in the field for seven of the last eight weeks...another had just undergone a five day ARTEP...several battalions had last minute commitments on the weekends.

These circumstances drag lesser units down. Not so in the excellent units. On the contrary, morale couldn't have been higher! They take pride in their flexibility and ability to endure hardships. Nothing could get them down. As one first sergeant told us, "We get picked for the hard missions. We don't complain about it, we accept it. In fact, the more crap they throw at us the better we like it!" We observed an attitude of "Let's do it!"

A. "WE ARE THE BEST!"

The units all display outstanding esprit. The excellent battalions continually told us "We're different, we are the best battalion in the Army." How did the units get to this high point? For one, the chain of command emphasizes the positive. As one battery commander told us, "We don't tear the soldiers down. The soldiers here are continually being told they are the best, and eventually it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy." That is one key: building up the

soldiers to where they think they are good. It becomes so intense that, as one first sergeant told us, "If you're not the best, we don't want you around here." We observed that if the soldiers thought they were good, they were good.

Secondly, all the battalions run hard PT. Units typically run 6-7 miles at a clip, and the soldiers love it. We found that after a unit finishes one of these demanding runs, they feel a tremendous sense of accomplishment. We noticed this feeling during our visits. We ran with a unit of 600 soldiers, and no one fell out! That made their feat all the more impressive. We found that an incredible amount of self and unit pride accompanies the successful completion of a difficult unit run.

How does one recognize this infectious pride? Just as our senior leaders had told us, "It's something in the eyes of the soldiers." It's the crisp, sharp salutes to officers. It's saluting officers in civilian clothes because "That's the way we do it around here." We recognized it in the state of police in the billets, the mess hall, and in the motor pool. It's not routinely accepting vehicles to break down on road marches. It's something that says "We're special."

It goes even further. The peer pressure, unlike many battalions we've seen or been in, exhorts one to "Be the best!" We heard about an example of what it meant to one young soldier assigned to an excellent armor battalion at Ft. Hood. He was in the hospital when his tank crew was due to qualify. He pushed for an early release and came back to qualify on his tank because he "didn't want to let the guys down." That's a far cry from soldiers faking illnesses or injuries to stay out of the field. As one XO told us, "In most units the outstanding people stand out. In this unit, the turkeys stand out. You are expected to be outstanding."

We also found that the excellent units create winners. Small, intermediate successes along the way lead to bigger successes. For example, the excellent battalions build up to the six mile runs. They don't decide one Friday to run six miles. Instead they start slowly, bringing everyone with them. Everyone successfully accomplishes the shorter runs. Then they increase the length of the runs. The people stay winners. And we found that the building of a successful PT program carries over to other areas in the battalion such as training and maintenance.

As a result, we saw contagious and fierce pride in the unit. It is something special to be a part of an excellent unit. As a group of E7s told us, "It's OK for us to bad mouth the battalion, but nobody else better try."

B. RISK TAKERS

Time and again we saw innovative training in the excellent battalions. The old "CYA" attitude just doesn't cut it anymore! Many commanders encourage risk taking.

1. Live Firing

As mentioned earlier, one battalion conducted a full scale live fire airborne and airmobile assault, also using indirect fire, cobras, and Air Force close air support. A hostage rescue mission provided the final mission for the night. As one battalion commander told us, "It's a risky business we're in, so that's how we train." The combined arms team receives heavy emphasis. A lot of units talk about combined arms and using all of the assets; in the excellent battalions they use the combined arms team frequently. The excellent battalions keep the soldiers challenged, and have found that the harder they push the soldiers, the better they like it. As one soldier told us,

"We do things in this battalion that other battalions just talk about."

The soldiers talked about meaningful, realistic training. And it pays off. One 82nd Airborne Division S2 told us, "I never believed that you're going to fight like you train until we went to Grenada. Now I do." A young rifleman related, "It took me almost a year to get confidence live firing my M-16. What I mean is the whole integrated act of hitting the ground, rolling into a good firing position, quickly aiming in a second or two, and squeezing off a couple of rounds that hit the target. You don't really learn how to do that on a range. Because of all our realistic training, I know I'm ready to fight."

2. Innovations

We observed other risky things. One battalion puts its officers in unfamiliar circumstances. For example, a battalion motor officer is made the OPFOR commander while preparing for the ARTEP. Why? It gives him a professional challenge and provides a taste of his upcoming command. And it gives the battalion commander a chance to evaluate his performance in an unfamiliar situation prior to command.

It extends to garrison life, too. Soldiers sign for and keep their protective masks, not the NBC NCO. That certainly isn't a safe thing to do if all you're worried about is the upcoming AGI. And we have already cited the example of the battalion that moved its AGI up four months so that it could concentrate on NTC preparation.

We saw innovative training in PT as well. The excellent units challenge their soldiers with drills and exercises not found in field manuals. One infantry battalion conducts the Japanese PT test, which provides a unique challenge.

Finally, the excellent battalions have a bias towards action. Instead of making excuses for not going to the field, these units go often. They experiment, learning from their tries. They train every chance they get. And their training is innovative.

C. UNIQUENESS, NOT GIMMICKS

The excellent units all have something unique about them. It is not a gimmick, but a strong unit identity that they seek. And it is tied into their mission. We didn't see the best "savings bond" battalions, we saw the best combat battalions. We observed the creation of the identity in many ways, from ceremonies to mottos to risk taking. One infantry battalion commander awards belt buckles to those soldiers who pass the battalion's warrior test, a twenty kilometer squad obstacle/reaction course. We observed an artillery battalion which always camouflages their faces before they go to the field. All of the excellent battalions have uniquely tough and realistic training. And we've mentioned the difficult PT that all the excellent units thrive on.

Battalions in Europe with border missions already have an inherent identity. Units identify with border missions. We observed stateside units that go the extra mile to instill the same type of unit identity. They capitalize on events such as being chosen for the M1 tank or the first Infantry Division Light artillery battalion. Or they run ten kilometers as a unit in a community run.

The point is all the units created a strong unit identity. This identity is manifested in the pride we saw in those units. A strong unit identity plays a major part in a unit's struggle to achieve excellence.

IX. CARING WITH A CAPITAL C

One of the most exciting events that we observed in the excellent battalions was the manner in which they took care of their people. Sure, everyone in the Army talks about this, but in the excellent battalions the soldiers told us they were truly cared for. As one first sergeant told us, "The chain of command can't fool a soldier. He knows whether the caring is genuine or not." The good news is that the excellent battalions live it, and we observed countless examples of taking care of soldiers.

A. INCENTIVES

1. Recognition

The excellent battalions frequently reward their soldiers. We saw the chain of command emphasizing positive reinforcement. The positive reinforcement comes about not only through formal awards, but also by the chain of command telling their soldiers when they have done a good job. These units realize that people like to be praised and will work harder as a result.

And the recognition is swift in the excellent battalions. Two or three months don't go by until an award is presented. We attended an ARTEP awards ceremony less than one week after the ARTEP ended. That unit believes in timely recognition.

One battalion commander related: "I'm known as the sugar daddy of awards in this battalion. I believe in their importance. One of my pet peeves is late awards. We don't have late awards in my battalion." The excellent units recognize soldiers before they leave the unit, and don't

have an award follow them on to their next duty station. As another battalion commander said, "It means something to them when I'm the one to shake their hand and pin on that medal they've earned while here."

The chain of command ensures recognition through hard work and proper planning. The immediate effects aren't always noticeable. But hearing the soldiers talk about it as they did, we as outsiders realize the importance of timely and frequent recognition.

2. Pay and Promotions

We found the chain of command goes to great lengths to take care of pay problems. Two or three months don't go by with repetitive problems for soldiers. Instead company commanders call finance officers directly if a soldier has a pay problem that can't be resolved. They refuse to wait for the system to debug itself. In one battalion the XO solves pay problems if the company commander can't get results. And it almost goes without saying that late pay vouchers are just not tolerated in the excellent battalions.

This commitment extends to promotions, also. One battalion commander chews incessantly on his officers to ensure that their Officer Record Briefs and photographs are updated. For the lower enlisted soldiers, some companies hold E3-E4 boards to prepare them for the battalion E5 board. As one first sergeant put it, "We want to identify the hard chargers and make sure they advance." Promotions and pay complaints may be mundane things, but not in the eyes of the soldiers or the chain of command in the excellent battalions.

B. THE ARMY FAMILY

1. Family Support Group

The family support program in the excellent battalions impressed us. We found that this program receives top priority in these units. It's not a half-baked program with a small percentage of the wives in the battalion attending. Instead it's an important event in the course of the battalion's life. Most of the battalions conduct monthly meetings with a large percentage of the wives attending. They employ speakers from the various Army services available and even from the local community. The battalions provide baby sitting service and translators. The commanders show their interest by attending at least every other month. As we said earlier, actions express commanders' priorities and their attendance at the meetings is no exception.

Make no mistake, these meetings are not social calls. Instead the wives conduct business with specific agendas.

But how did the battalions get their programs into such good shape? We found the aftermath of Grenada is partially responsible. Those units that deployed had problems. Many of the wives had no idea where their husbands were initially, had no money for weeks, and didn't know where to turn. As one XO told us, "We just weren't ready for Grenada from the family aspect." So for the Ft. Bragg battalions, turning this program around received top priority. And the Grenada stories have spread to other posts like wildfire. People on other posts told us about the problems the families had during Grenada. The Grenada experience certainly had something to do with the outstanding shape the family support programs are in.

But we found that Grenada is not the whole story. The battalions work at making this program what it is. They

mail information about the meetings to the wives. They don't give fliers to the soldiers for them to place in file 13. The units mail information packets to the wives before a major off post deployment. Consequently the wives know when the battalion is going to the field, who to call if a problem arises, and when the soldiers will return. As one E4 said, "I've always felt this battalion cared about my family. I can soldier better knowing they are taken care of when I'm in the field." Soldiers are given incentives to attend with their wives; for example, a half day off. Another battalion CSM does it a different way: "I make it mandatory for the wives to attend the first meeting when they arrive in the battalion. They like it so much they keep coming back."

And it doesn't stop with just meetings. The excellent battalions go out of their way to involve the families, from organization day to Halloween parties for the children. In another case we witnessed an armor battalion which brought the wives out to see tank gunnery. This battalion tries to show the wives as much training as possible. The chain of command doesn't think up all of the reasons why they can't bring the families out to the range (for example it's unsafe or we can't get transportation), but instead they make it happen. The result? As one CSM put it, "If the wives know what you're doing, or trying to do, they'll support you." We heard stories of the wives coming in and decorating the barracks and providing all sorts of goodies, from fried chicken to cakes and cookies, whenever the men come back from the field. The family program plays a big part in the battalion's story of success. For the excellent battalions, the family is a combat multiplier, not a nuisance.

2. Taking Care of Their Own

We heard a story in one battalion about a soldier's baby who had died. The battalion managed to put together a significant amount of money for the soldier and his wife to fly back home and have the baby buried there. We heard this story at all levels in the battalion, and it symbolizes the way the battalion takes care of its fellow soldiers.

We heard other stories. For example, the soldiers don't let someone drink too much and get in trouble. Instead they cut peers off and escort them back to the barracks. As one soldier explained, "If he's in my unit, we don't want him in jail. We don't want to let our company down."

C. COUNSELLING

1. Listening

The excellent units take the art of listening seriously. We found that the chain of command spends an extraordinary amount of time just plain talking and listening to its people. Sure this is time-consuming, but the perception of the soldiers is, "They care enough around here to listen to me when I have a problem." As mentioned, many commanders have no set open door policy. If a soldier has a problem and needs counselling, they make themselves available any time.

2. Timely and Efficient

Often, regular counselling gets lip service in a lot of units. Not so in the excellent ones. NCOs counsel their soldiers monthly. They take the time to counsel properly because they listen to the soldiers. We found these are not counselling sessions which consist strictly of areas for

improvement, but it is two way communication with positive strokes, too.

It doesn't stop with the enlisted soldiers, either. We found the officer efficiency report (OER) support form[15] is used on a regular basis by the battalion commanders. Commanders are evaluated against objectives and support forms are updated as necessary. These battalions realize that the number one motivator of people is feedback of results.[16]

D. SOLDIERS, OUR MOST IMPORTANT RESOURCE

1. Treatment

The excellent battalions treat people like winners. In one battalion the chain of command went out of its way to obtain refrigerators and new furniture for its soldiers. They were originally told they couldn't get the new items. However, persistence paid off, and the soldiers received the items for their rooms. The message in that battalion is that the chain of command cares enough to provide the soldiers with the luxury of having a refrigerator in each room. And in turn the soldiers respond. As the CSM said, "We tell them that their living areas are a little nicer, a little cleaner, and in return we expect a lot from them for this trust. And it works."

Another unit has its section chiefs go to the soldiers' off post quarters and check living conditions once every three months. They are not inspecting, but care enough to see the living conditions of their soldiers.

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[15]The officer efficiency report form is a document that the rated officer prepares within thirty days of assuming a new duty position. In the support form the rated officer describes his responsibilities and specifies his performance objectives.

[16]The recent best seller, The One Minute Manager, emphasizes this point.

2. Follow Up On Problems

We found that if a soldier has a problem, the chain of command doesn't stop with just pointing him in the right direction or calling the right agency. Instead they follow up, pursuing the issue if the results aren't satisfactory. Sergeants get involved by escorting soldiers to the right folks. The best example of a chain of command working came from Ft. Hood. A soldier had been falsely arrested for stealing a car. Instead of judging his soldier guilty, the company commander testified for his soldier. This was the first time that judge could remember a commander having the conviction to testify for a soldier. That one act of faith made a tremendous impact on the soldier and that company. The company commander is now something of a legend in his unit.

3. Schooling

Military schooling provides a significant dilemma for many commanders. On the one hand, commanders must consider the soldiers' professional development. On the other hand, sending soldiers to school makes it harder for the unit to accomplish its missions while they are gone.

We found the excellent units allow the soldiers to attend school. As one battalion commander told us, "I don't stop people from going to the Advanced Noncommissioned Officers Course when it would be convenient to keep them here and make them go through the ARTEP." Schooling and professional development don't take a back seat to training or the AGI. These units make short term sacrifices to build for the long haul. They consider the good of the individual and the Army.

4. In the Know

The lines of communication are good throughout the battalion. We found that the soldiers down the line know what is going on. They are kept informed at the lowest echelon. In one unit the battalion commander puts out the phrase of the day and then checks it out with the soldiers in the motor pool later. A gimmick perhaps, but it allows the commander to test his communication channels.

We have tried to illustrate in this chapter the extraordinary efforts made by the excellent battalions to take care of soldiers and their families. We have not mentioned everything, such as the outstanding sponsorship program we saw in one battalion or the company commander and his first sergeant who visit a family in their home immediately after arrival. The point is the excellent battalions have a strong understanding of the fact that when families and personal problems are taken care of, you have better soldiers. Sure it takes time and commitment on the part of the chain of command, but as we were told, you can't fake sincerity.

Everyone talks about taking care of the soldiers. In the excellent battalions, they do it.

X. HIGH STANDARDS AND DISCIPLINE

We must confess that from the start we tried hard to separate these attributes, but we couldn't. We went round and round trying to figure out a way to convey the message that these two ought to be separate characteristics, but it didn't work. High standards and discipline are really one attribute because they tie together so closely.

A. DO IT RIGHT

We found that the excellent battalions do things right all the time, or they don't do them at all. Things aren't done half-baked. One artillery battalion wears camouflage paint to the field every time they go. Foxholes are dug in every position. The airborne units bring their airmobile slings. Nets go up automatically in every position. The excellent battalions absolutely hate the word simulation. We found S1 and S4 shops in the field, not running the show from the rear. The excellent units don't make excuses for not going to the field--they go! And they don't borrow half of another battalion to get there.

The attitude we saw was that "There is just not time to get ready for war; you have to be ready." And to be ready, you have to train in peacetime like you would fight. That's not just us saying this; we heard it in units that had seen combat in Grenada. Doing it right becomes a way of life in the excellent units.

What happens when you take shortcuts? We heard the story of a unit which left a critical piece of firing equipment when it deployed to Grenada. Apparently this unit got used to simulating when it alerted, and routinely left this

equipment behind. The result could have been disastrous in Grenada. The lesson? "If you do something, do it right!" This type of critical oversight doesn't occur in the excellent units.

Doing it right doesn't end in the field. We saw one motor pool where all the tanks were perfectly aligned, the gun tubes were in travel lock and the tarps were tied down the same on every tank. Doing things right is the standard in the excellent battalions.

B. CONSISTENT

We found that the good units don't peak for one event at the expense of all others. They remain at an acceptable level in all areas, whether that area is the big event on the training calendar, or not. Ideas like quarterly gunnery and mini-AGI inspections ensure this. As one battalion commander told us, "We don't drag all of the division's assets out with us for the sake of one event like gunnery. One event doesn't take a superhuman effort, we just take it in stride." For that battalion, AGIs and ARTEPS are checkpoints on the way to combat readiness.

C. HIGH STANDARDS...

A common theme in all the battalions is their absolute insistence upon setting and meeting high standards. These battalions don't settle for the Army standard, but instead develop tougher ones. And they're proud of it! We saw the Common Skills Training Test with 22 tasks instead of 17...the ARTEP fire mission times reduced by 25 percent in an artillery battalion...battalion runs with a standard 4-mile time of 32 minutes, not 36. High standards such as these are common in the top-notch units.

This extends to many other areas of battalion life. One BMO told us, "It used to be OK in this unit if we lost half our vehicles during a road march. Now if we drop one, we don't meet our standard."

We witnessed an even more dramatic example of high standards during an armor battalion's recent gunnery. Currently at Ft. Hood the battalions set their own standard for qualifying their tank crews. This armor battalion prides itself on the tough courses it sets up. As the S3 said, "We don't put our targets out in the open to make it easy for the guys, like in some battalions. We place them where Soviet tanks realistically would be. And we don't use the same range to qualify that we do for practice, or give the crews extra time." What is the effect? As one member of a crew stated, "I had to work just to qualify this year. It was rough!" This unit knows its crews really are qualified, not just "paper qualified."

D. ...BUT ATTAINABLE

Although the standards are high, they aren't out of the unit's reach. The battalion commanders know exactly where to put them so their units are challenged, but not frustrated. People don't feel like they have to compromise their integrity to reach a standard. As one company commander said: "With our previous battalion commander the standards were high, and if we didn't make something like a high OR (Operational Readiness) rate, then the heat was on to get the percentage up. We have the same high standards now, but we won't lie about something like an OR rate."

We had an armor battalion commander tell us his tank gunnery standard is to have every tank and section qualify, not be distinguished. He feels that is a tough, but realistic, standard.

E. DISCIPLINE, THE HALLMARK

1. Fair and Swift

Discipline is tied closely to high standards in the excellent battalions. When asked to describe the discipline in their units, people responded with words like fair and swift. The battalion commander's policies are fair, with clear expectations. The battalion's soldiers know that for a drug offense they are going to see the "old man" and that maximum punishment will be rendered. The same goes for driving under the influence of alcohol. For other offenses, though, case by case consideration is the rule in the battalion. And the NCOs are involved too. They accompany their soldiers to see the battalion commander, and their recommendations are heard. People aren't babied, either. If the maximum punishment is in order, then that's what the soldier receives. Additionally, justice is swift. A week or ten days doesn't elapse while a soldier awaits an Article 15.

2. A Responsive Attitude

We found that discipline creates a responsive attitude in the unit. The people who can't reach the high standards of the battalion usually don't last very long. The chain of command doesn't spend a lot of time with bad soldiers in the excellent units. Good men don't want "duds" around. The old maxim about spending eighty percent of the time with the bad soldiers and twenty percent of the time with the good soldiers doesn't hold water in the units we visited.

The standards are enforced in the excellent units. As one officer told us, "Our colonel isn't the namby-pamby type who's afraid to use discipline. He just relieved one of our warrants, and for good cause too."

3. But Not Used Indiscriminately

In the excellent units, Article 15s are only one of the tools being used to correct behavior. Many units use "extra training" as an alternative to Article 15s. The excellent battalions realize the consequences of an Article 15, especially in today's competitive Army; they look long and hard before they give one. In fact, we were amazed at how few Article 15s are used in the battalions. Perhaps that can be attributed to the standards and self discipline that are in evidence at all levels of these battalions.

We hope you've seen how high standards and discipline are interrelated. They work together in helping to make a unit excellent. Doing things right to a high standard creates an attitude that says, "Anything less than the best won't be tolerated in this unit." To the units we visited, high standards and discipline are the foundations of excellence.

XI. TEAMWORK, A WAY OF LIFE

A. "WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER"

Teamwork is a way of life in the excellent battalions. Their sense of cooperation could be likened to that between close friends. When we talked to soldiers from one company, they invariably praised other companies. There is a rivalry present, but, nonetheless, the companies hold each other in high esteem. Cooperation extends to the staff also. We heard of companies and staffs routinely cooperating toward a common goal. Staffs go out of their way to support the companies. They understand that their role is to support the companies and not to run them.

We witnessed a superb example of this relationship between staff and company at Ft. Bragg. The battalion staff in one artillery battalion there prepared the batteries for a Division Artillery (DIVARTY) Readiness Test. They were ruthless as they raked them over the coals, grading even harder than the DIVARTY inspection team would. The result? The three firing batteries of the battalion had the highest scores in DIVARTY.[17] When we talked to the battery commanders, they told us the significant role their battalion staff played in that success.

The sense of cooperation spread to critical relationships in the battalion. The key relationships between commanders and their senior NCOs are tight. Why does this occur? Because, as one CSM put it, "He commands the battalion and I run it." These key folks have worked hard on clarifying their expectations of each other and defining

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[17]This Division Artillery Readiness Test evaluated twelve firing batteries.

responsibilities. The strength of those key relationships prevents problems from developing in those battalions.

The battalion commander-XO-S3 relationship is also close. During the course of the interviews we were amazed that these three top leaders in the battalion all espouse the same philosophy. As one S3 told us, "I always know what the old man's thinking." Or as another one put it, "We're in this thing together."

B. COMPETITION UNDER CONTROL

Competition between units is a controversial issue, but it was interesting to see how the best units handle it. We're in a competitive business. But we found that companies in the excellent battalions compete against a standard, not against each other. There are not four losers for every winner (which goes back to the philosophy of making everyone in the battalion winners). And they compete at the right things--things that relate to mission and combat readiness.

One battalion commander told us, "I've thought long and hard about competition, because I've seen the backstabbing it can cause. My philosophy is that there is enough inherent competition in the Army. There are already many comparative measures and performance indicators. Additional ones are not needed."

For us, the question was answered. The teamwork displayed by these battalions solved this dilemma for us. The battalion commanders are competitive people, to be sure, and the people within the battalion are a competitive lot. But in the best outfits, the battalion commanders have them competing as a battalion towards high, attainable standards, and not against each other. Instead of one winner, we saw five.

C. THOSE BLOODY MEETINGS

The sense of cooperation that marked the battalion extends to the manner in which the battalion conducts its meetings. Dime dropping does not occur in front of the battalion commander. Instead companies and staff work out a lot of "touchy areas" outside the command and staff meeting.

For example, one battalion conducts a dress rehearsal with just the staff and the XO present. The staff briefs the XO on what they want to cover in command and staff meetings before the regular meeting. In this way people aren't surprised, and commanders' time is saved by only briefing pertinent items.

Excellent battalions disdain formal meetings. We did not observe knockdown, drag-out three hour marathon meetings. Instead we witnessed short, effective ones. We think this can be attributed to the many lines of informal communication that are present.

In one battalion, the commander has an informal fifteen minute meeting with the CSM, XO, and the S3 before PT every day. In turn, the XO holds a brief informal session with his staff right after PT. The lines of communication are open. As a result, they don't waste much time in meetings.

D. PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

Teamwork in the battalions extends to planning. We witnessed battalions that live the Battalion Training Management System (BTMS). All the companies are included in the planning process of setting the battalion goals. It is done as a team, and lip service is not paid to the BTMS process. They game plan toward success together.

We saw officers and NCOs working as teams in the excellent battalions. We saw units pulling together, united by a single goal of being the best. We envied the spirit and

camaraderie these units displayed, and we longed to be in one of these excellent units. We could not deny the incredible feeling we got just living in the battalion for a couple of days. We knew we had found excellence--and teamwork was a big part of it.

XII. CONSISTENT EXCELLENT PERFORMANCE

A. SYSTEMS IN PLACE AND WORKING

1. SOPs

One of the trademarks of the excellent battalions is the standard operating procedures (SOPs) that are in place and working. This is one of the keys to maintaining excellence amid all the turmoil that the battalions face. Of course, all units have SOPs; in the excellent units, they are enforced. For example, we witnessed several outstanding logistics SOPs that have been developed by the battalion XOs. But the impressive part is not that the wording is so detailed (which it is) or that everyone knows his job. What impressed us the most is that the battalions live their SOPs.

The use of SOPs extends to training also. As one armor battalion commander told us, "I want commanders who are tired to be able to accomplish the mission. SOPs for attack formations, cross attachments, and exploitation help us to perform. The key is to use them." We also saw SOPs for load plans and correct wear of the field uniform and equipment.

What is the result of using the SOPs? The units get better every time they go to the field, because they aren't always reinventing the wheel. The battalions encourage changes to their SOPs when something doesn't make sense. And when new people come into the unit, the SOP is a vital indoctrination tool, not something pulled out and changed two weeks before the AGI.

2. Tasks, Conditions, and Standards

The excellent units conduct performance oriented training regularly. For everything the battalion does, the task, conditions, and standards are all explicitly stated. The expectations are understood by all before the event; consequently, the soldiers have something to strive for.

B. PERFORMANCE COUNTS

Above all else, the reason we were sent to the excellent units was their superb performance. We saw high performing units. These units excelled at everything they did, from the ARTEP to the AGI to the maintenance inspections. We found that although top-notch performance was a prerequisite to being excellent, all units that are high performing are not necessarily excellent. Performance counts, but it's not enough.

The other seven pillars of excellence detail for you the things high performing units do to become the best. In these units, the leaders are skilled not only in their own branches, but in all the combined arms. These units don't peak for one event, but instead maintain all areas at an acceptable level all year. Thus, they avoid the peaks and valleys that plague many battalions. Indeed, we actually saw the consistent superior performance that our senior leaders told us should be present in the excellent battalions.

XIII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. CONCLUSIONS

Yes, there are truly excellent battalions in our Army. The pages you've just completed reading have offered a vision of what excellence is and how to achieve it. What does it all tell us?

First, the general officers we talked with were really attuned to the units they command. The vision of the senior officers we talked to created command climates where excellent battalions could develop. As with the excellent battalion commanders, the corps and division commanders did much to foster an atmosphere of trust and loyalty, and instilled these values in the officers and NCOs who worked for them. Although we found a great deal of agreement between the general officers about the common attributes of excellent battalions, we found that there is no systemic view or method of identification of the best battalions in the Army.

We saw smart, highly trained, and dedicated soldiers in these excellent battalions. As one general told us, "Combine today's higher quality soldiers with concerned, capable leadership to produce outstanding battalions." A major way in which today's leaders demonstrate concern is their treatment of soldiers' families. The leaders of excellent battalions don't fight this development or curse it; they work with the families and turn them into combat multipliers. Another unique aspect of the excellent battalions' treatment of the soldiers was their concern with the soldier as a whole--his body, mind and spirit. Not just on duty, but off duty, as well.

The issue of competition provided one of the biggest surprises for us in this project. Excellent battalions expected their companies to compete against very high standards, not against each other. All units that met the standard were rewarded. Thus, there was the potential of having more than one winner. The effect that this system had upon loyalty and teamwork was phenomenal. In essence, this constructive competition created excellent battalions, instead of excellent companies.

The importance of the battalion commander really struck us. We didn't set out to prove this, but we found him to be a critical factor in each of the excellent battalions. Additionally, these commanders had instituted many of the same values and systems within their battalions. The similarities were uncanny, even though we looked at units separated by 3000 miles, with vastly different mission statements. Our research tells the story of those similarities.

We found a consistent style of leadership among the battalion commanders of these excellent units. They were all calm, relatively quiet men who demanded high standards and lived them; but they all tolerated failure as the cost of learning. It was interesting for us to discover that none of the present commanders of these excellent battalions took over "bottom of the heap" outfits. These battalions had all established reputations under the prior "hard-ass" commanders of being able to accomplish all missions. The critical factor here is that none of these battalions, when commanded by "tough as nails" commanders, were able to evolve into excellent units under that hard style of leadership. Under hard-fisted leadership, they had gone from "poor" to "good." This view was shared by senior leadership (outsiders) and soldiers within the battalions. Certainly, there is some food for thought for all of us here.

Our research appears to have independently validated McGregor's Theory X-Theory Y. To us, Power Down embodies Theory Y concepts. These excellent units had developed to a certain point utilizing Theory X leadership style. The commander had then recognized that the new situation in the battalion called for Theory Y principles, such as decentralization. It is important to understand from this discussion that neither Theory Y nor Theory X is always correct. Each style has its own time and place. From what we observed in the excellent battalions, they had developed to the point where Theory Y principles were appropriate, not Theory X.[18]

Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Theory further explains the conditions we found in these excellent battalions. The leaders in these battalions correctly identified the maturity level of their subordinates for various tasks, and applied the suitable task and relationship behaviors to influence their soldiers to accomplish a given mission. When subordinates were untrained and required more supervision, they utilized a more directive approach. As soldiers learned a particular job, the commander gradually adjusted his leadership style to encourage more autonomy.[19]

In the past we've seen different leadership styles succeed and fail in Army units, without understanding why they worked or failed. There is a tendency to find a leadership style that works in a situation and apply it in all cases. We think there is no one best style that always works. The circumstances in the unit, and the commander's and subordinate's skills must all be taken into account when

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[18]Theory Y-Theory X and other related theories are discussed in Warner's book Organizational Development: Principles and Practices.

[19]For a thorough discussion of Situational Leadership, see Hersey and Blanchard's book Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources.

deciding how to best lead soldiers. We believe this to be the key to successful Army leadership today. Had you been in the units we visited, you'd believe this, too.

Some other major challenges face the "Army of Excellence." For instance, in all of the excellent battalions, realistic training to high standards was essential to their success. Yet we heard many complaints of reduced ammunition allowances for training. The units we visited all expressed a need for more ammunition to most effectively train for war.

The excellent battalions have learned to adapt to massive doses of new technology and new people. The Army has taken huge strides in recent years toward creating stability by implementing innovative personnel assignment systems. Several of the units we visited were the beneficiaries of these decisions.

One of the ideas that struck us in the excellent battalions that lacked personnel stability was the vast amount of time the leaders spent addressing the expectations of the unit to individual soldiers. Time spent explaining policies holds these battalions together through thick and thin.

An important conclusion to be drawn from our work is that our Army is on a roll. Those excellent units we were privileged to spend time with are on their way to bigger and better things. We can all be proud of that. These excellent battalions gave us a glimpse of what's working in today's Army. Once again, the eight pillars of excellent battalions we identified were:

- Lead by example. If the leaders can do it, the soldiers will do it.

- Focus on combat: a shared value. If it gets your unit ready for war, it's worth doing. Everyone in the battalion understands this.

- Power down. Decentralize responsibility to the lowest practical level. This does not mean compromising standards.

- Strong unit identity. We are unique! We are important; we're the best!

- Caring with a capital C. On and off duty, the leaders must demonstrate a genuine concern for the soldier and his family.

- High standards and discipline. They go together. Standards should be tough, but attainable. Reward those who meet the standard. Punish or retrain those who don't.

- Teamwork, a way of life. We're in this together. We compete against a set standard or another battalion, not each other.

- Consistent excellent performance. This got these battalions nominated, but it's only the beginning.

From looking over the list, you've probably discovered no new secrets of success. Most of these have been written about by leaders or theorists for centuries. We didn't set out to develop new theory or to disprove the old; neither did we attempt to reinvent the wheel. Instead, we have provided you a picture of how the best battalions operate today. We've presented our ideas, but as one general told us, "You can't make this subject too scientific."

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

Now where do we go from here? Our research is completed, but we realize we've raised many questions that will go unanswered until someone else looks into them.

1. For Researchers

For example, we've not examined units outside CONUS. Are the characteristics of an excellent battalion in Korea or Germany the same as the ones we've identified? Also, we've focused on a rather small sample of seven battalions. Would more detailed research on seven armor battalions identify significant differences when compared to seven artillery or infantry battalions? A problem that plagued us to the end was the suspicion, shared by many leaders and other soldiers we talked to, that excellence could not be maintained over the long term; the gut feeling was that the idea of excellence is a rather transitory thing. Research to track the development of the life cycle of an excellent battalion may discover a more exact answer to this problem. This type of research could also be done for combat support or combat service support battalions.

We also recommend that future researchers learn from a slight difficulty we encountered. It would be to their advantage to develop a more specific interview guide of questions to help them differentiate between questions that identify the characteristics senior evaluators look for in an excellent battalion, and questions dealing with steps taken by those outfits to achieve excellence.

Other techniques that could be used include the use of a survey instrument or a comparative study of relative strengths of certain attributes between good, average, and poor units. Indeed, we found the search for excellence to be a fascinating field.

2. For Our Army

We have several recommendations that we'd like to communicate to the leaders of our Army. These are the direct result of our look at some of the finest combat battalions in the Army.

First, don't take away any more bullets from our training! Realistic live fire exercises were absolutely crucial, according to the leaders and soldiers of the units we visited.

Continue to do all you can, at all levels, to increase personnel stability in our units. Don't move crew or squad members needlessly. The resultant increase in unit cohesion will more than compensate for any imagined gain caused by the move.

Leaders, look beneath the veneer of flashy success. Reward the innovators and risk takers in the fields that are critical to battlefield victories.

Remember that soldiers are our most important resource. Time spent training and caring for soldiers is time invested wisely in the future of our Army.

We learned an incredible amount by talking to the senior officers, battalion grade officers, NCOs, and junior soldiers we encountered. This project has given us a professional education about developing excellent battalions that we hope to put to good use in our military futures. If the information contained in these pages is thought by you to have merit, we encourage its use in battalion professional development classes and leadership departments in our various Army schools.

We are not advocating we have found the "right" answers to creating excellent battalions; indeed, such a claim would be foolish. There may be no totally right or totally wrong approach to the challenge of excellence. However, we do believe that continued research and analysis of leadership functions can only benefit our Army in its continuing quest for excellence. We want our Army as a whole, and each member of it, to be all that we can be!

APPENDIX A
METHODOLOGY

Of course, our interest in the study of excellence was stimulated by the Peters and Waterman best seller In Search of Excellence. We liked their idea and decided to do a similar study of the Army's excellent units. We began with the premise that excellence was based upon the subjective opinions of senior evaluators of the battalions. We divided our study into Phase I (evaluators) and Phase II (within the battalions).

A. PHASE I

Our quest for excellence began with a letter to corps and division commanders of the posts we desired to visit (Ord, Lewis, Hood, and Bragg). We included copies of our Officer Records Briefs (ORB) with each letter. We followed this with a phone call to the aide or Secretary of the General Staff (SGS). Initially, we were apprehensive about whether the letter and call would gain us an appointment on the generals' calendars, but our fears proved to be unfounded. The interest generated by our topic on each of the posts was overwhelming. We were to find in later interviews that this is a provocative topic that everyone wants to talk about. Through a point of contact on each post we were able to arrange interviews with the corps and division commanders and key evaluators on their staffs. Typically, we talked to the CG, ADC, G1, G3, IG[20] and several brigade commanders during our Phase I interviews. We spent one week

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[20]CG (Commanding General), ADC (Assistant Division Commander), G1 (Personnel Officer), G3 (Operations Officer), IG (Inspector General).

at each of the installations we visited. The interviews usually lasted from one to two hours with each of the senior officers (and sergeants major) we talked to. What an experience those interviews were! It isn't often that junior officers get to sit down one-on-one with generals and colonels in key command or staff billets and pick their brains about what makes the best units tick. It's an experience we'll never forget!

Our Phase I interviews began with a brief introduction of ourselves and our study. It was during this time that we often were asked to list our credentials (to insure we were qualified to write on such a topic). During Phase I we wore the summer greens uniform; we found that it gave us a certain amount of notoriety and made it easy for secretaries and aides to identify "those graduate students working on their thesis." In the Phase I interviews we generally asked two questions and then sat back and took notes and asked questions for clarification. The two questions were "What makes a battalion one of the best in the Army?" and "What would you see if you went down to visit it?" We were surprised to find that many of the general officers had prepared notes and were thoroughly prepared to talk to us. At the end of each interview we asked the officer to nominate a battalion that met his criteria for excellence. The last day at each post we spent contacting battalions we wished to visit during Phase II. We visited the battalion commander and he provided us a point of contact.

The really exciting moments came, however, when we talked to some of the lieutenant colonel staff officers who had recently commanded excellent battalions themselves. We could see the gleam in their eyes and sense from their enthusiasm that they weren't talking about abstract concepts of excellence--they'd lived it! After those interviews we were awestruck from the glimpse of excellence we'd just

seen. It was after the second of these energy-packed interviews that we really began to believe that we'd find some excellent battalions on our search.

After we'd visited all the posts, except one, for our Phase I interviews, we sat down and compiled our first list of the pillars of excellence. We'd each gone through our notes and compiled our own list of characteristics. We found the senior officers agreed on many of the pillars. Then we had a sort of "shootout at the OK corral" to develop our team list of attributes of excellent battalions. We utilized a brainstorm technique with each of us posting our list. Then we commented on each other's contributions and combined similar ideas into one list of concepts. We were quite amazed at how easily the list developed. Now we were on our way; this list gave us a good point of reference for our Phase II interviews.

B. PHASE II

During Phase II we spent two days assessing each of seven battalions. Our points of contact (usually the adjutant) set up one hour interviews with representatives from the battalions. We always interviewed the battalion commander first. Other individual interviews conducted were with the executive officer (XO), S1, S2, S3, S4,[21] motor officer, all unit commanders, the command sergeant major and all first sergeants. We also conducted group interviews with five or six platoon sergeants, groups of ten to twelve E5 to E6s, and about fifteen junior enlisted soldiers (E1 to E4). The soldiers who attended the group interviews were randomly selected (we double-checked) and represented each unit in the battalion.

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[21] S1 (Personnel Officer), S2 (Intelligence Officer), S3 (Operations Officer), S4 (Supply Officer).

We usually started each interview by giving some personal background and providing a brief outline of our study. We then asked why they thought this battalion had been named for us to visit. The response to this question was almost always "Because we get all the jobs done right!" We then asked what was going on in the battalion that made it so good. From that point on, it was off to the races! We usually just hung on for dear life and asked a few questions for understanding. All too often, the hour ended before anyone in the room was out of steam (except us). We ended each interview by asking how good this battalion really was. Was it the best in the division, corps, or Army? The answer to that question gave us a sense of perspective for each of the battalions.

While in each of these battalions, we ran PT with them, ate in their mess halls, looked in their motor pools and barracks, and attended their meetings. We were able to get a more complete picture of how things operated by watching soldiers at their place of duty. Our final act in each battalion was to outbrief the battalion commander on what we'd seen.

Altogether we talked to approximately 200 officers, NCOs, and junior enlisted soldiers in the seven battalions we visited. It is from their comments that we were able to complete our list of attributes common to excellent battalions.

Well, that's how we did it. The interview comments that this research is based upon are on file in the Dudley Knox Library, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California 93943.

APPENDIX B

THE ARMY BATTALION

The battalion is the integral combat element on the battlefield. Its combat, logistical, and administrative elements make it virtually self-sufficient.

The typical combat arms battalion (armor, artillery, and infantry) is commanded by a lieutenant colonel (05), with about 17 years active duty. Usually there are five subordinate units, called companies or batteries. Each company is commanded by a captain (03). There are between 500 and 700 soldiers in a battalion, depending upon type and configuration.

An armor battalion typically contains 54 tanks. There are 18 howitzers in an artillery battalion. There are several types of infantry battalions; these include light, airborne, and mechanized.

Additionally, when we refer to the staff throughout our work, we mean the following: The S1 is the personnel officer, usually an 03; the S2 is the intelligence officer, typically an 02; the S3 is the operations officer, which is usually an 04; and the S4 is the supply officer, typically an 03. The command sergeant major (CSM) is the top sergeant in the battalion, an E9, while the first sergeant is the top sergeant in a company, an E8. The executive officer (XO) in a battalion is usually an 04.

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